

INTERPRETATIVE THEMES

KANSAS CITY MUSEUM

AT CORINTHIAN HALL

From the Past to the Present



South façade of Corinthian Hall, 3218 Gladstone Boulevard, 1913.

The quandary of what-to-do with significantly altered areas in the house is exemplified by the well-meaning 1959 “restoration” of the Louis XIV Salon, by Museum volunteers. The work was done without vigorous research, and missing elements such as the chandelier were simply replaced with available alternatives. The historical authenticity is questionable as well as stylistically inaccurate, in reference to surviving period photographs of the interiors. Such efforts can create a false sense of history.

Corinthian Hall’s future is best anticipated as not a standard house museum; it has been too greatly altered for that. The property is historically significant and can function well as a place to interpret Kansas City’s history. This can be pursued partly through the story of the Long Family which exemplifies significant trends in the history of Kansas City and the nation, trends that are relevant to our understanding of America today.

Kansas City Museum opened to the public on May 5, 1940 and is housed in Corinthian Hall, the 1910 limestone Beaux Arts mansion of lumber baron Robert A. Long. Kansas City Museum long served as a general interest science and history museum and its historic site has undergone many modifications over the years. The Museum, and Corinthian Hall, stand now at a crossroads. The building’s owner, Kansas City, Missouri, has begun extensive reconstruction and rehabilitation at the site. The Museum is re-evaluating the role of the great house and its grounds.

Corinthian Hall today is the product of its early 20th-century construction and of the changes that have occurred since original owner R.A. Long’s death. The Museum is challenged in that many original furnishings were removed, before the Museum was conceived, in a 1934 estate auction. The few items that have entered the Museum collection were used by family or collectors for a generation before their return to the site.

The Secretary of the Interior outlines four “treatments” appropriate to historic properties:

PRESERVATION

maintenance of property retaining historic integrity in good condition

RECONSTRUCTION

recreating sufficiently documented missing elements

RESTORATION

returning to period appearance, assuming most original material remains

REHABILITATION

adapting a property to a new use in a variety of ways



Charro, c. 1980s. Embroidered and appliquéd wool; with accessories. Life-sized. 2011 Gift of Esther Wolf to the Nuestra Herencia Collection. The charro joins the large and important collection of historic textiles and clothing, and is a major addition to the growing collection of materials documenting Kansas City’s long and rich Latinola heritage.



Concept Sketch of the Carriage House Gallery detailing the life and career of Loula Long Combs. She was the daughter of the builder of the house R.A. Long and a founder of the America Royal.



Concept Sketch of the Kansas City History Galleries proposed for the 2nd floor of Corinthian Hall.

Mission

The mission of the Kansas City Museum at Corinthian Hall is to collect, preserve and interpret the history of Kansas City, Missouri.

Vision

The Kansas City Museum envisions that its visitors will experience a meaningful personal connection to the city’s histories and be inspired toward thoughtful citizenship.

Five Themes

of the Kansas City Museum Interpretative Plan

- The Long Family and Their Legacy
- Corinthian Hall
- Corinthian Hall Gardens
- Kansas City Cultures and Histories
- Kansas City Museum Costume Institute



The Gardens at Corinthian Hall, Summer 1916. The Pergola is embraced by fragrant wisteria that still grows at the site.



The Garden Conservatory at the north-west corner of the estate, 1939. The small building will be restored to its original appearance, having been converted to serve as a Planetarium in the 1950s.